



Kyrgyz Republic

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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Although the 1993 Constitution defines the form of government as a democratic republic, President Askar Akayev continued to dominate the Government. Serious irregularities marred the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as the 2002 parliamentary by-elections. Serious irregularities also marred a national constitutional referendum in February that resulted in further control by the President and weakened the Parliament and the Constitutional Court. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the executive branch dominated the judiciary, and the Government used judicial proceedings against prominent political opposition and independent media figures in numerous instances.

Law enforcement responsibilities are divided among the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) for general crime, the National Security Service (SNB) for state-level crime, and the procurator's office for both types of crime. Civilian authorities generally maintained control of the MVD and the SNB, and maintained full control of the State Border Guard Service (SBGS). Some members of the security forces committed serious human rights abuses.

The country had an economy based on a mixed balance of agricultural and industrial production, and a population of approximately 5 million. The Government carried out progressive market reforms, although some intended reforms were not implemented fully. Gross domestic product declined by 0.5 percent. Foreign assistance played a significant role in the country's budget. Unemployed workers and government workers with low salaries or unpaid benefits continued to face considerable hardship. Pensions were paid, but the amount provided only for subsistence living. The average annual income was \$230, while the subsistence level income was estimated at \$366 per year. Sixty percent of the population lived below the poverty level. Corruption was pervasive and affected every segment of society.

The Government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in some areas; although there were improvements in some areas, it continued to commit numerous abuses. The Government severely limited citizens' right to change their government and democratic institutions remained weak. Members of the security forces at times beat and otherwise mistreated persons. Prison conditions remained very poor, but improved slightly during the year. Although impunity remained a problem, numerous MVD officials were dismissed or prosecuted for abuses or misconduct. There were many cases of arbitrary arrest or detention. Executive branch domination of the judiciary limited citizens' right to due process, and its interference affected verdicts involving prominent opposition figures. The Government restricted some privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press, although it allowed an independent printing press and television station to begin operations. The Government used bureaucratic means to harass and pressure the independent media, some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the opposition. The Government restricted freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

At times, the Government placed restrictions on some religious groups. Citizens were usually able to move freely in the country; however, the Government attempted to block the travel of citizens to politically significant events on several occasions. The Government continued to harass and pressure some human rights groups, although a government Ombudsman's Office actively worked to advocate for individual rights. Violence and discrimination against women were problems. Violence against children was a problem, and there were growing numbers of street children. Discrimination against ethnic minorities was a problem, as was child labor. Trafficking in persons was a persistent problem, which the Government took steps to address.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents; however, there was one death under suspicious circumstances.

The Osh Media Resource Center reported that Ernis Nazalov, a journalist in the southern part of the country who had been investigating government corruption, died in September under suspicious circumstances. Vecherniy Bishkek, an independent, pro-government newspaper, concluded that Nazalov drowned after falling into a canal following a wedding. Local authorities said an autopsy showed no signs of foul play; however, Nazalov's father reported that his son's body had knife wounds and a broken arm. An investigation was ongoing at year's end.

There was limited accountability for MVD forces that opened fire on groups of unarmed demonstrators in Aksy in March 2002, killing 6 and injuring 24. On May 16, a court overturned the convictions of the four police officers convicted of the killings in December 2002, although the officers were fired from their jobs and one other higher-ranking official was demoted. Procurator General Chubak Abyshkov was fired in October 2002, but during the year he was appointed procurator of the Chui Province. Citizens continued to call for higher-ranking officials to face accountability for the Aksy events (see Section 2.b.).

During the year, one person was killed by landmines laid by Uzbekistan forces in Kyrgyz territory in response to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) incursions into both countries in 1999 and 2000 (see Section 1.c.).

In March, 19 Uighur (members of an Islamic Turkic group native to western China) citizens of China, who were traders, were killed during an attack on a Chinese bus. Authorities suspected two Uighur nationalist extremists, who were believed to be hiding abroad. An investigation remained ongoing at year's end.

By year's end, one suspect was in custody for the killing of a Chinese diplomat in 2002; he was undergoing psychiatric evaluation to see if he was fit to stand trial.

During the year, Uzbekistan border patrols shot eight Kyrgyz civilians, killing six persons and injuring two, in incidents near nondemarcated border areas.

b. Disappearance

On September 7, Sadykjan Rahmanov, a Kyrgyz citizen and mullah of a mosque in the southern town of Uzgen, disappeared. Local police investigating the disappearance reported that a vehicle seen leaving the scene belonged to an officer of the Uzbek National Security Service. An investigation by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) also concluded that Rahmanov was likely kidnapped by the Uzbek National Security Service. Prior to 1993, Rahmanov lived in Namangan, Uzbekistan.

An international NGO reported that the Uzbek National Security Service abducted six Kyrgyz citizens in Kyrgyzstan. Local human rights advocates reported that there were 260 Kyrgyz citizens serving sentences in Uzbek prisons who were kidnapped from Kyrgyzstan by the Uzbek Security Services. Most of these individuals had earlier lived and studied religion in Uzbekistan.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits torture, mistreatment, and inhuman or degrading punishment; however, police and SNB forces committed abuses including beatings and other mistreatment. At times, police used beatings to extract confessions. There were several credible reports that police beat human rights activists and demonstrators while in detention. The supervision of conditions for pretrial detainees was poor; police were supervised poorly, were not always paid promptly, and at times committed crimes.

On September 8, the Supreme Court overturned a lower court's acquittal of Belovodsk police officers for the 2001 torture and forced confession of a prisoner. At year's end, the case was pending further investigation and retrial by the garrison military court where it originated.

The police at times used force to disrupt opposition demonstrations (see Section 2.b.). There were reports that low-level officials harassed and discriminated against persons seeking asylum, including Uighurs, and on at least one occasion police beat a woman who was representing the Uighur community (see Sections 2.d. and 5).

Some corrupt police officers reportedly targeted homosexuals in Bishkek by extorting money through blackmail and intimidation. The NGO Oasis, which works for the protection of the rights of homosexuals, reported that such an incident occurred in October; the victim did not report the incident to the police, claiming that the police had failed to act on previous complaints he had made.

Prison conditions were very poor and included overcrowding, food and medicine shortages, poor health care/disease prevention facilities, and lack of heat and other necessities, although they improved slightly since their transfer to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in 2002. While the Directorate Supervising Penal Institutions (DSPI) reported that there were no deaths among prisoners due to malnutrition during the year, the MOJ reported that 20 percent of inmates died each year, primarily due to disease and malnutrition. However, during the year the state budget significantly increased the daily food allowance for prisoners from \$.20 to \$.50 (8 soms to 21 soms).

In August, Parliament adopted the law on Bodies and Institutions of the Penitentiary System, which provides for the primary principles underlying the operation of the penitentiary system. Based on the law, the DSPI developed the internal rules for correction facilities and two more documents regulating the work of prisons. The MOJ developed and enacted a new DSPI staffing pattern complying with international standards for penitentiary systems. The MOJ also reorganized the DSPI Executive Office and established a Medical Services Department. In addition, the DSPI, working with a number of international and local NGOs, established a Training Center for the staff of correctional facilities.

The tuberculosis incidence rate declined by 26.8 percent during the year (700 cases versus 956 in 2002), while the tuberculosis mortality rate declined from 439 to 205. During the year, 38 HIV cases were diagnosed in prisons; the total number of HIV infected prisoners is 102. The incidence of STDs declined to 454 from 479 in 2002. According to the Directorate, the total mortality rate among prisoners declined by 47 percent during the year: to 275 from 513 in 2002. Tuberculosis was the primary cause of death among prisoners, accounting for 90 percent of deaths.

The MOJ continued to oversee the non-SNB prisons. Prisoners detained by the SNB were kept in SNB facilities; after conviction they were held in a regular prison. During the year, the MOJ pursued a program of prison reform to train prison staff and improve the conditions of prisoners. According to officials from the DSPI, they began implementing reforms designed to: Ensure humane treatment of prisoners, bring prison conditions in compliance with international standards, introduce alternative punishments, and provide medical and social rehabilitation. The DSPI paid particular attention to improving conditions of underage and female prisoners. As part of these reforms, prisons were generally more accessible to international organizations.

Countrywide, 34 corrections facilities held approximately 17,500 prisoners. Many prisoners had serious diseases; approximately 2,500 prisoners had tuberculosis and 185 had HIV/AIDS. Male and female prisoners were held separately. Conditions in the women's prison were less overcrowded than in those for men, and inmates were allowed to perform menial labor to earn money needed to provide necessities. Juveniles were held separately from adults. There were no special facilities for political prisoners. Pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted prisoners. Pretrial detention facilities were extremely overcrowded, and conditions and mistreatment generally were worse than in regular prisons.

The law provides that 1-day in solitary confinement counts towards 2 days of a prison sentence. However, after approximately 1,000 days in solitary confinement, prison authorities moved opposition leader Feliks Kulov to a low-security prison, without reducing the length of his prison sentence (see Section 1.e.).

Prison visits by family members were at the discretion of the investigator during the investigation phase. After a conviction, family members were allowed to visit a prisoner regularly.

The Government usually permitted domestic and international human rights observers to visit prisons. The International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC) reached an agreement with the MOJ in August 2002 allowing free access to visit detainees in prisons under its jurisdiction. The ICRC was allowed to visit detainees in SNB prisons and pretrial detention centers in accordance with the ICRC's standard procedures. However, the ICRC was not allowed to visit jailed opposition leader Feliks Kulov during the year (see Section 1.e.).

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law and the Constitution prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, police at times used ill-defined charges to arrest persons and could be bribed to release them.

The SNB handles state crimes and the MVD handles general crime. Within the MVD there are nine regional

offices, one in each of the seven oblasts and the cities of Bishkek and Osh. Under them are town and local police departments. These regional offices and their sub-offices report to both the MVD and to their respective local authorities such as the Governors of the Oblasts and town mayors.

Impunity remained a problem; however, during the year numerous MVD officials were dismissed and prosecuted for various offenses, including corruption, abuse of authority, and police brutality. The MVD could not provide statistics on the number of police charged with brutality because the Criminal Code classifies "police brutality" under articles outlawing abuse of power and exceeding authority. According to the MVD, during the year, 73 criminal cases were opened against 110 police officers, of which 47 were for abuse of power or exceeding authority; 7 cases resulted in convictions, and 17 police officers were punished for taking bribes. Disciplinary actions were taken against 2,288 MVD employees, including 1,507 cases of negligence to official duties, 95 cases of being drunk while on duty, 36 cases of rude and tactless treatment of persons; 248 employees were fired and 122 demoted. Corruption, particularly the payment of bribes to avoid investigation or prosecution, was a major problem at all levels of the law enforcement organizations. Both the MVD and the SNB deal with corruption and organized crime.

In the spring, Ar-Namys co-Chair Emil Aliev claimed that police detained him briefly before releasing him due to lack of evidence. He reported that he was followed daily while driving his car but reported no other harassment.

The procurator's office determined who could be detained, arrested, and prosecuted. The procurator must issue an arrest warrant before a person may be detained, and there were no reports that this provision was abused. The Criminal Code permits law enforcement officials to detain suspects for 72 hours before releasing them or charging them with a crime. The Criminal Procedure Code requires notification of a detainee's family by the investigator within 12 hours of detention; however, this requirement often was not observed in practice. Persons arrested or charged with crimes had the legal right to defense counsel; if a suspect was charged, the procurator was required to advise defense counsel immediately. Defense counsel should be permitted to visit the accused within the first 3 days of incarceration; however, at times the accused did not see defense counsel until trial.

Human rights groups noted that children who were arrested usually were denied lawyers. Police often did not notify parents of children who were arrested, and generally neither parents nor lawyers were present during questioning, despite laws to the contrary. Children often were intimidated into signing confessions.

Economic crimes such as tax evasion, embezzlement, and theft of government property were common; prosecution for these crimes was rare but at times appeared to be directed at opponents of the Government.

The SNB, the MVD, and the General Procurator carried out investigations. The accused usually remained in detention while the procurator investigated and prepared the case for trial. The procurator had the discretion to keep the accused in pretrial detention for as long as 1 year, but there were regulations that provided for provisional release before trial. After 1 year, the procurator was required to release the accused or ask Parliament to extend the period of detention. There have been no known instances in which Parliament was asked to extend a detention.

The Government continued to express concern about groups that it viewed as extremist with either radical religious or political agendas. Security forces detained 89 persons during the year for membership in the illegal Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic organization and distribution of its literature (see Section 2.c.).

Authorities detained some demonstrators during the year (see Section 2.b.).

On February 27, authorities detained Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society President Edil Baisalov against his will in a hospital for 4 days, beginning the day before a scheduled Freedom House conference on political freedom, allegedly for treatment of medical conditions that exempted him from military service.

Azimbek Beknazarov, a Member of Parliament, who was detained in January 2002 and held in pretrial detention until March 2002, was given a 1-year suspended sentence in May 2002 and resumed his parliamentary duties during the year.

In the past, the SNB arrested Uighurs on ill-defined charges; however, there were no reports of such arrests during the year (see Section 2.c.).

The law does not provide or prohibit forced exile, and there were no reports that the Government employed it in practice. The president of the Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights (KCHR) went into self-imposed exile abroad in

May (see Section 4).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the executive branch continued to dominate the judiciary. The courts were perceived widely as a rubber stamp for the procurator and for high-ranking government officials.

Very low judges' salaries led to a credible view among lawyers and citizens that all but a very few scrupulously honest judges were open to bribes or pressure. The Constitution gives the President the authority to appoint and dismiss judges. The President appoints judges at all levels, who must be confirmed by the lower house of Parliament. The President may dismiss judges on the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court only with the approval of a two-thirds majority of the lower house of Parliament. The Constitution provides that local laws determine provisions for dismissal of judges of local courts.

Cases originate in local courts; they can move to appeals courts at the district or regional level and finally to the Supreme Court. There are separate military courts and a separate arbitration court system that handled economic disputes.

The amended Constitution, adopted on February 2, increases the power of the Supreme Court, making it the highest judicial body for civil, criminal, and administrative judicial proceedings. It eliminated the highest court in the arbitration court system and transferred its powers to the Supreme Court. The Constitutional Court has responsibility for determining the constitutionality of laws, resolving disputes concerning the interpretation of the Constitution, and determining the validity of presidential elections. Under the new Constitution, the Constitutional Court can no longer intervene with actions of the Supreme Court, except in cases related to the Constitution. The new Constitution narrowed the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court by eliminating access for citizens seeking to defend their rights. Only the President, Parliament, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Central Election Commission can now appeal to the Constitutional Court. In its place, the Court was given specific authority to determine the constitutionality of activities by NGOs, political parties, and religious organizations.

Traditional elders' courts consider property and family law matters and low-level crime. Cases are submitted by agreement of the parties; decisions of elders' courts can be appealed to the corresponding municipal court. Local elders' courts are under the supervision of the procurator's office but do not receive close oversight since many are located in remote regions. The procurator, not the judge, is in charge of criminal proceedings. The procurator brings cases to court and tries them before a judge and two people's assessors. The court compares the facts as presented by the procurator and the defense and in most cases makes its decision after receiving all available information in each case. The court may render one of three decisions: Innocent, guilty, or indeterminate. If indeterminate, a case is returned to the procurator for further investigation. The decision of a court to return a case to the procurator for further investigation may not be appealed, and accused persons were returned to the procurator's custody, where they could remain under detention.

The law provides for defendants' rights, including the presumption of the innocence of the accused; however, such rights were not always respected. The judicial system continued to operate, in many cases, under Soviet laws and procedures in which there was no presumption of innocence and the focus of pretrial investigation was to collect evidence sufficient to show guilt. The Criminal Procedure Code provides for an unlimited number of visits of unlimited duration between an attorney and a client. Although official permission for such visits still is required, such permission usually was granted.

The law permits the accused and the defense counsel the right to access to all evidence gathered by the procurator, attend all proceedings, which were usually public, to question witnesses, and to present evidence. However, these rights were not always respected in practice. All members of the court had equal rights and could question witnesses. Witnesses did not have to present their testimony in court; instead they could affirm or deny their statements in the procurator's files.

The Constitution provides terms for judges that range from 10 years for Constitutional and Supreme Court judges to 7 years for local judges. Judges of the highest courts are nominated by the President and approved by Parliament. The President appoints local court judges.

Under the revised Constitution, former presidents have criminal and civil immunity and cannot at any time be detained, searched, interrogated, or arrested. On June 26, Parliament passed a law extending immunity to the family of Akayev as recognition of his historic role as the country's first President. Judges enjoy limited immunity

under the revised Constitution and they may only be arrested or searched if caught in the act of committing a crime. Prosecution of a judge requires the approval of the Supreme Court, and prosecution of a Supreme Court Judge requires consent of the legislature. In previous years, legislators used their parliamentary immunity to avoid being brought to court; however, a 1998 amendment to the law in theory limited their immunity to official acts only.

Defendants were afforded the same constitutional protections in both military and civilian courts, although military court proceedings could be closed to the public. A civilian could be tried in a military court if one of the co-defendants was a member of the military. Military court cases could be appealed to a military appellate court and ultimately to the Supreme Court.

In May, Tynchtyk Duulatov, a member of the political council of the Ar-Namys party, fled the country to avoid prosecution for kidnapping. The charges were likely politically motivated and stemmed from an incident that occurred while Duulatov was monitoring the polls on February 2 during the constitutional referendum. The alleged kidnapping took place when Ar-Namys election observers questioned an individual from a group that was engaged in multiple voting. After admitting on videotape to the observers that he was part of a group that authorities were bussing around to vote at multiple polling stations, the alleged victim said he was forcibly detained. Police questioned Duulatov at the scene and took him into custody on March 24 on charges of attempting to take a hostage. He was released on bail on March 27 and subsequently left the country.

Feliks Kulov, leader of the Ar-Namys Party and former parliamentary and presidential candidate, continued to serve concurrent sentences of 7 and 10 years for his abuse of power convictions in 2001 and 2002 that resulted from apparently politically motivated prosecutions (see Sections 1.c. and 1.d.). On August 15, the Supreme Court upheld Kulov's 2002 conviction; the Supreme Court had earlier upheld his 2001 conviction.

There were no reports of other political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions; however, the Government at times violated these prohibitions. The Constitution prohibits unlawful entry into a home against the wishes of the occupant and protects a person's private life, privacy of correspondence, telephonic, and telegraphic communications; however, these provisions were not always respected in practice. The law and procedures require the General Procurator's approval for wiretaps, searches of homes, interception of mail, and similar acts; however, the procurator can give approval over the telephone for searches, which means that in such cases no written proof exists to verify that the search was approved. In certain cases, law enforcement officers can carry out a search first and then get approval within 24 hours. If approval was not given, any evidence seized is inadmissible in court.

Relatives and fellow villagers of political prisoner Felix Kulov reported SNB surveillance, harassment, and employment loss because of their alleged support for him. Authorities reportedly pressured employers to dismiss Kulov's supporters in Bishkek and his native village of Baitik.

The SNB continued to monitor the Uighur community (see Section 1.d.). There were unconfirmed reports by citizens active in politics or human rights monitoring that the privacy of their communications was violated. The Government continued to conduct widespread document checks of some foreigners. These checks often resulted in the detention and deportation of those who were not in the country legally (see Section 2.d.).

Organizational structures responsible for violations of privacy rights during the Soviet era largely remained in place.

Family members of Tynchtyk Duulatov, a member of the political council of the Ar-Namys party, reported that unidentified persons threatened them numerous times over the telephone and that police visited them several times during the year (see Section 4).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The new Constitution and the law provide for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted these rights. The new Constitution also prohibits censorship and compelling citizens to express their ideas or opinions. The law on mass media prohibits the dissemination of government and commercial secrets; inciting war, violence, or intolerance toward ethnic or religious groups; desecration of national norms, ethics, and

symbols (such as the national seal, flag, or anthem); pornography; and encroachment on the honor and dignity of a person (libel).

Government newspapers, television, and radio continued to receive government subsidies, which permitted the Government to influence their coverage and to apply financial pressure on independent media by fostering unfair competition for scarce advertising revenue. Increasingly, individuals with close ties to the Government owned and controlled partly or fully news outlets.

There were approximately 25 to 30 newspapers and magazines with varying degrees of independence, including some that had only local circulation. Eight of these were state owned. The state printing house, Uchkun, was the primary newspaper publisher in the country, with several small presses located inside and outside of the capital.

The nongovernmental Media Support Center (MSC), which the Government registered in 2002, opened an independent printing press on November 14. The press was a full-service printing house focusing on newspapers. By year's end, the press was printing 4 politically oriented newspapers and 6 commercial newspapers.

During the year, the Government registered four new independent radio and television stations; by year's end, three had begun operating. However, the son-in-law of President Akayev was a partial owner of one of those outlets, Love Radio in Bishkek. Foreign media, including the British Broadcasting Corporation, Associated Press, Reuters, and Agency France Press, generally operated freely. However, Radio Azattyk, the country's affiliate of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, reported that police harassed and detained its journalists in the past, particularly when reporting on demonstrations. A number of Russia-based media outlets, such as Rossiskaya Gazeta and Komsomolskaya Pravda, also operated freely in the country, but because they were registered with the MOJ the Government considered them local media.

The Government used its influence over printing and distribution of print media to impede the dissemination of information by the independent print media. In May, the Leninsky District Court in Bishkek confiscated 15,000 copies of Moya Stolitsa Novosti from the Uchkun printing press. That issue reportedly included articles on the commercial activities of the President's son-in-law and alleged violations of press freedom.

Unknown persons continued to commit acts of violence and intimidate members of the media. In September, freelance journalist Ernis Nazalov, who was investigating local government corruption, was found dead in a canal in the southern city of Osh, with some suspicion of foul play (see Section 1.a.).

On January 20, Alexandra Chernykh, a Moya Stolitsa Novosti journalist and daughter of the newspaper's chief editor Rina Prijivoit, was assaulted in the street. In June, a car belonging to Moya Stolitsa Novosti editor-in-chief Alexander Kim was set on fire. On October 16, two assailants attacked Abduvahad Moniyev, Osh-based reporter for independent Kyrgyz-language newspaper "Agym." Although the journalist recognized one of the attackers, the police did not actively pursue an investigation until the journalist made the case public. After the investigation began, one of the attackers came forward and filed suit against Moniyev stating that he started the fight. The journalist believed that he was attacked due to his independently written articles. In addition, southern journalists reported increasing harassment by Uzbek border guards when attempting to cross into Uzbekistan.

All media were required to register with the MOJ and wait for ministry approval before beginning to operate. The Media Law states that the registration process should take no longer than 1 month, but the process often took much longer. Part of the registration process included background checks on each media outlet's owner and source of financing, including international donor organizations. The Government denied registration to Moya Stolitsa in December.

Although the new Constitution prohibits censorship, government interference with independent television and radio stations continued. New processes were implemented requiring frequencies to be distributed on a competitive basis, which led to longer time periods before authorization to use a frequency was granted. In September, the Government created a media council to arbitrate government-media disputes, which consists of government and media representatives. Media organizations and journalists criticized the formation of the council. During the year, the Council urged the President to sponsor legislation that would introduce a fee on lawsuits filed against media outlets and to decriminalize libel. At year's end, Parliament was debating both bills.

News reports on Pyramida television, which was the only truly independent television station in Bishkek, became less independent due to a new news director who used to work for government media and reportedly had close ties with government leaders. Pyramida also was involved in an ongoing dispute with the National Communication Agency over its broadcasting license.

Libel was a criminal, not a civil, action. The Government, acting through compliant courts, used the prohibition of material that encroaches on the honor and dignity of a person to harass and apply pressure on the independent media. Honor and dignity lawsuits filed by government officials against newspapers increased dramatically in the first part of the year on both the national and regional levels but decreased in the second half of the year following widespread international criticism of the practice. Since November 2002, 34 suits were filed against independent newspaper Moya Stolitsa Novosti. The total sum of court fines due to these suits was approximately \$100,000 (4,300,000 som); the high costs of these fines forced the newspaper to close on June 12. The newspaper reopened as MSN, and published its first issue on June 27. Kyrgyz Ordo newspaper, an opposition Kyrgyz-language newspaper, also closed during the year due to high court fines.

A local government official filed a lawsuit for libel against Alisher Toksonbaev, an Osh journalist with the NGO Protection of the Rights of Journalists, for a February article. The lawsuit, which was pending at year's end, was the thirty-fourth lawsuit against Toksonbaev since 1990.

There are no laws regarding Internet media. There were no credible reports that the Government censored or blocked access to the Internet. In March, Foreign Ministry officials sued the independent newspaper Obshestvenniy Rating for posting an anonymous letter on a website that detailed alleged professional irregularities within the Ministry.

The Government restricted academic freedom by removing from all public schools a locally written health teacher's manual prior to the start of the 2003-2004 school year. Schools had been using the book during the previous 4 school years. The Ministry of Education received complaints from parents about the text's discussion of HIV/AIDS and condom usage. The Ministry has not replaced the book with any other health text.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, on occasion the Government restricted this right in practice and used force to disrupt peaceful demonstrations.

The law and the new Constitution require that authorities receive notification of public gatherings and give authorities the right to prohibit gatherings under certain conditions. Permits are required for public marches and gatherings, which usually were available; however, in some cases authorities refused to issue permits to opponents or critics of the Government. At times authorities, including those at local levels, used these requirements to prevent rallies and demonstrations.

Rallies and demonstrations were held regularly in front of the White House, Parliament, and in other places. During the year, numerous protests, demonstrations, and pickets took place in different areas of the country, including Bishkek, Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Naryn. In most cases, demonstrations took place without interference from authorities; however, there were instances in which security forces forcibly disrupted demonstrations and meetings.

On May 16, 18 women from Aksy were proceeding to Government House in Bishkek to deliver a petition to President Akayev demanding prosecution of those responsible for the Aksy violence in March 2002 (see Section 1.a.). Police beat three women and detained the entire group for 10 hours for failing to have proper identification. The women staged a hunger strike through May 22 to express their continuing dissatisfaction with the impunity granted to the officers responsible for the incident.

In August, the Government denied prominent members of the opposition permission to hold a "kurultay" (public forum) in Bishkek, after allowing them to hold a kurultay in 2002. Local authorities allowed an alternative kurultay only in the southern city of Kerben, 300 kilometers outside of Bishkek, and the event took place on August 23.

In September and October, the Government denied investors in the defunct Renton Company permission to hold a demonstration in front of the President's Office, arguing that such a demonstration would disrupt public order. However, since October, the investors were allowed to hold other demonstrations, including one in front of the President's Office.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association; however, at times local authorities restricted this right in practice. The Law on Public Organizations--which include labor unions, political parties, and cultural associations--requires registration of these organizations with the MOJ.

In May, the Government denied the Ar-Namys political party's application for space to hold a party conference.

Also in May, nine participants at a peaceful meeting on "problematic border issues" were detained, two of whom were tried and fined \$23 (1,000 soms).

The new Constitution prohibits activities of foreign political parties and NGOs, including their representative offices and branches that pursue political goals. The OSCE expressed concern that this provision could limit domestic monitoring and human rights groups, in addition to political parties.

During the year, the Government required the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society to reregister after it amended its charter in December 2002. On August 4, the MOJ used the constitutional provision on activities of foreign political parties to deny the Coalition's first application for reregistration, which it submitted in July. As part of the reregistration process, the Government required that the Coalition provide a list of all its members, which it did in August. The Government approved the reregistration on October 2, after four unsuccessful attempts. On August 13, the MOJ required the KCHR to apply for reregistration and accepted the registration of a splinter group with new leadership on September 24, thereby stripping the group of its leader and registration (see Section 4.).

The law on NGOs distinguishes them from political parties, labor unions, and religious organizations and lowers the required number of members for registration. The registration of an NGO requires at least 3 members; the registration of a political party requires at least 10. There was widespread domestic NGO activity throughout the country on issues ranging from human rights to environmental protection (see Section 4).

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions on freedom of religion, particularly the activities of Islamic groups that it considered to be extremists and a threat to the country. Islam was the most widely practiced faith.

Since 2001 the Government worked with representatives of various religious faiths and NGOs to develop a draft law on religion. The draft law has been debated in the Parliament and passed two readings. The third reading is scheduled to occur during the spring 2004 session. Representatives of religious communities expressed concern that some Muslim believers could be named extremists under the law. In April 2002, the Central Asian Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a statement strongly opposing the draft law, citing concerns that its passage would result in a flood of foreign missionaries.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) was responsible for promoting religious tolerance, protecting freedom of conscience, and overseeing laws on religion. Under the law, all religious organizations were required to register with the SCRA, which was required to recognize the registrant as a religious organization. Each congregation was required to register separately. Religious organizations, including religious schools, were required to register with the MOJ to obtain status as legal entities, which was necessary for them to own property, open bank accounts, and otherwise engage in contractual activities. Under the tax code, religious organizations were required to pay taxes on commercial activities. The Ministry's registration process was cumbersome, taking a month on average. In practice, the Ministry never registered a religious organization without prior registration by the SCRA.

Several religious organizations reported delays registering with the SCRA. The majority of these were small Christian congregations and Islamic organizations. All of them were eventually registered. According to the SCRA, it registered all churches that applied for registration during the year. The Church of Jesus Christ reported that 10 of its churches succeeded in registering by year's end, with another 6 applications pending.

The Government was concerned about political extremism disguised as conservative Islam, particularly Wahhabist interpretations. Armed incursions by militants of the IMU in the summers of 1999 and 2000 increased the Government's apprehension about radical Islam and the actions of its followers. The Government, leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Muftiate expressed concern over new religious movements posing a threat to stability, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Unification Church, Falun Gong, and other Christian "sects." The Muftiate issued a fatwa (legal decree) denouncing the activity of Hizb ut-Tahrir in December 2002.

Religious leaders noted with concern that the SCRA frequently used the term national security in its statements. Law enforcement authorities, including the MVD and the SNB, often played a role in investigating religious organizations and resolving inter-religious disputes. Representatives of smaller churches, such as the Church of Jesus Christ, complained of government attempts to hamper their activities. However, a pastor of the Catholic Church denied that the Government had attempted to hamper the Church's activities during the year.

The arrest and prosecution of persons accused of possessing and distributing literature of the Hizb ut-Tahrir organization increased during the year. Most arrests occurred in the South and involved ethnic Uzbeks; those arrested typically were charged with violation of Article 299 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits the distribution of literature inciting ethnic, racial, or religious hatred. The SCRA chairman stated in 2002 that there were approximately 2,000 Hizb ut-Tahrir followers in the country. The MVD reported that during the year 89 persons were detained for distribution of Hizb ut-Tahrir literature.

In May, the head of the local administration closed six of the nine mosques in a Jalal-Abad district, claiming that they were on state-owned land and that their imams were preaching contradictory views, although he later reopened two mosques. Of the remaining seven, four were turned into housing for poor families, while the other three remained closed and unused. After their closure, he stated that he could monitor the remaining imams' activities and ordered the closed mosques' destruction, which began in October.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ reported that government pressure was aimed at closing their Church. On August 15, the Ministry of Finance denied the Church's appeal of the demand of the tax inspectorate of Bishkek's Oktyabr oblast for payment of \$110,000 (4.8 million sums) on member donations to the Church. Authorities allegedly threatened to confiscate the Church's building as payment. The Church's pastor contended that the tax bill was an attempt to punish and shut down the Church because one-third of its 9,500 members are ethnic Kyrgyz, who are traditionally Muslim. In December, the Church reported that during a meeting between its representatives, Tax Police officials, and officials from the Tax Commission, they agreed with the Church that donations were not taxable and sent the case back to the Tax Inspectorate.

A number of missionary groups operated in the country. Missionary groups were required to register with the Government, and the SCRA registered 119 foreign missionary groups during the year. A missionary from Korea and 10 missionaries from Qatar were prohibited from further activities as missionaries for violating the law.

The Government expressly prohibits the teaching of both religion and atheism in public schools. In 2001, the Government instructed the SCRA to draw up programs for training clergy and to prepare methodologies for teaching about religion in public schools. These instructions came in response to concerns about the spread of Wahhabism and what the Government considered to be unconventional religious sects.

In December 2002, the Muftiate announced the formation of an expert commission to review and standardize Islamic educational literature printed and distributed in the country, the construction of mosques, and activity of Islamic groups.

In April, some teachers in the Jalal-Abad region at the Khamza school told children not to perform daily prayers, even at home. A teacher at the school harassed the children who admitted that they prayed at home by singling them out and hitting them on the head. Teachers at the Babur school in the Bazarkorgon district also told students not to pray.

In the spring, teachers in several schools in the Osh region prohibited pupils from wearing the religious headscarves (hijab) in school. At the Lomonosov school in the Karasuu district of the Osh Province, girls were prohibited from wearing hijabs. School authorities held meetings with students, where police threatened the girls with arrest if they continued to wear the hijab. After some of the parents sought assistance from the school principal, they were told that their children should leave school if they continued to wear the hijab.

There was anecdotal evidence of periodic tension between followers of conservative Islam and foreign missionaries in rural areas. Converts from Islam at times faced discrimination. Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders defended such actions with criticism of nontraditional Christian groups' proselytizing activities. The SCRA chairman called for tolerance on all sides.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27846pf.htm).

d. Freedom of Movement within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice; however, certain policies continued to complicate internal migration, resettlement, and travel abroad.

The law requires that citizens have an official government permit (propiska) to work and settle in a particular area of the country. Applicants for such a residence permit must file a request for registration with the local police and be able to prove that they have a permanent residence in the area. In addition, home and apartment owners can

sell their property legally only to buyers with such permits. During the year, law enforcement agencies conducted sweeps and random checks to verify the proper registration of residents (see Section 1.f.). Authorities fined or imprisoned individuals without residence permits stamped in their passports. Local administrations tied the availability of utilities and social services to registration; individuals who did not register could be denied access to water, heat, light, subsidized health care, or schooling. The linkage between obtaining a residence permit and obtaining community services disproportionately affected the growing number of internal migrants. Many employers refused to hire applicants residing illegally.

A 2002 law on internal migration provides for an end to the travel permit system. The working group established to implement the new law met four times during the year, and by year's end had produced three regulations to supplement the law covering internal migration.

There is no law on emigration. The SNB reviewed all passport applications. There are no exit visa requirements and citizens can travel abroad without an exit visa; however, travel abroad requires an "international page" in one's passport. Unlike in previous years, travelers were not required to present letters of invitation to receive the page if they had never traveled abroad. After the validation of the passport, travel was unrestricted. The law prohibits emigration within 5 years of working with state secrets; however, there were no reports that anyone was barred from emigration under this statute during the year.

On October 31, the SNB refused to provide Dilbar Momunkulova's passport the "international page" required for foreign travel. An activist who protested impunity for the 2002 Aksy shootings, she was planning to attend an OSCE conference on torture in Vienna in November.

Although official figures were not available, press reports indicated that the emigration of both ethnic Russians and Russian speakers continued during the year, primarily as a result of the lack of economic opportunities. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), approximately 50,000 Kyrgyz labor migrants worked in Kazakhstan and 300,000 in Russia.

Emigrants were not prevented from returning to the country, and there reportedly was a small but steady flow of returnees.

The law provides for the granting of asylee or refugee status to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided some protection against refoulement and granted asylum or refugee status. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and other international humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. UNHCR registered 116 Afghan asylum seekers, 7,047 Tajik refugees, 4 Uighur refugees and 2 Uighur asylum seekers, and 6 Iranian refugees. The Government registered all refugees, except the Uighurs and the Iranian refugees. The Government denied refugee status to 37 Afghans. All of the Iranians reportedly left for other countries.

During the year, there were 7,805 refugees, with an additional 625 whose applications were pending at year's end. The Government repatriated 73 Chechens to Chechnya and 28 Afghans to Afghanistan. An additional 29 Afghans were settled in a third country. In total, UNHCR closed 1,170 cases due to repatriation, naturalization, or resettlement.

According to the UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Migration Services Department, authorities provided temporary protection to 457 refugees from Chechnya. The Government did not grant Chechen refugees official refugee status, but it allowed them to obtain asylum seeker status, which provided them with some legal protection. Chechen refugees reported experiencing low-level harassment from law enforcement officials.

The UNHCR maintained programs to provide medical aid, legal advice, and other services to refugees. The UNHCR also worked closely with the Government to develop documents for legal protection.

The Government maintained new controls on the movement of some foreign nationals and conducted sweeps in order to find undocumented foreigners. During the year, a total of 85 undocumented foreigners, primarily Pakistanis, Indians, and ethnic Chinese and Uighur citizens of China were reportedly arrested for visa violations. Of the 85 arrested, 31 were deported. During the year, refugees and asylum seekers continued to be subject to heightened security measures. The UNHCR intervened in several cases on behalf of individuals detained by the MVD until their status could be determined and documented.

There were no reports of the forced returns of persons to a country where they feared persecution, although there

were reports in earlier years of Uighurs opposed to Chinese policies being repatriated forcibly to China where they feared persecution. According to the UNHCR, Uighurs remained at risk of deportation, particularly if they were involved with political and religious activities in China.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, in practice, the Government restricted citizens' ability to do so.

A Constitutional referendum held on February 2 was highly flawed and marred by serious irregularities, as were parliamentary and presidential elections held in 2000. During the referendum, election observers noted widespread electoral violations and disputed the Government's turnout and vote count figures. Observed violations included: Manipulation of the ballot count, forged voting results, individuals voting multiple times, and individuals voting without documents. There were many occasions where election officials prevented independent observers from monitoring the election process.

After President Akayev announced the formation of a Constitutional Council made up of government officials and civil society representatives in 2002 to propose various amendments to the Constitution, the Council proposed numerous changes. These proposals were given to an Expert Group of government officials and legal scholars to finalize the work of the Constitutional Council and draft an amended Constitution that would be voted on as a referendum by a straight yes-or-no vote. The government-prepared final text of the amended Constitution differed significantly from what had been offered by the Constitutional Council, with many of the Council's recommendations ignored and many others added by the Expert Group. Observers criticized the new Constitution for strengthening the President's authority at the expense of the Constitutional Court and Parliament, which was scheduled to be reduced to a unicameral body after parliamentary elections are held in 2005. The new Constitution gives the President the authority to appoint and dismiss members of the Government and to dismiss Parliament.

President Askar Akayev continued to dominate the Government. The amended Constitution approved in February further increases the President's powers. Under the new Constitution he has a virtual veto on any legislative act and additional powers to dissolve the legislature, as well as immunity after leaving office. Nevertheless, on several occasions during the year President Akayev pledged publicly to honor the constitution and step down at the end of his current term in 2005. Despite constitutional limitations, Parliament has demonstrated a degree of independence by overriding two presidential vetoes of legislation.

October 2002 parliamentary by-elections in four electoral districts were generally orderly and competitive in three districts, but serious voting irregularities were observed in one district where the race was strongly contested. Irregularities included voting without identity documents, multiple voting using the supplemental list, and distribution of ballots upon presentation of a student card.

In 2000, President Akayev was elected to a third term as President. Although the Constitution specifies a 2-term limit for the President, the Constitutional Court ruled that Akayev could serve a third term because he had been elected to his first term under the Soviet-era Constitution. The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) stated that international standards for equal, free, fair, and accountable elections were not met. The Government took steps to disqualify otherwise qualified candidates by charging and convicting them on questionable criminal charges. Although six competing candidates offered the electorate some political choice, the restrictive process of candidate registration excluded a number of prominent opposition leaders from the election. Harassment of opposition candidates and NGOs negatively influenced the fairness of the campaign.

In two rounds of parliamentary elections in 2000, four political parties were blocked from competing because their charters did not state specifically that they could compete in elections for state bodies. The OSCE noted that executive and judicial branch interference in the electoral process continued through the runoffs. A number of opposition candidates were harassed and opposition leader Felix Kulov was imprisoned on politically motivated charges, preventing him from being a candidate (see Sections 1.d. and 1.e.). Although there were improvements in overall election administration on the day of the vote, there were allegations of ballot tampering, government intimidation of voters, and harassment of campaign officials in the elections of a number of opposition leaders.

The Government continued to impede the functioning of opposition political groupings and the expression of opposition views in the media (see Section 2.b.). Opposition politicians and members of prominent NGOs reported incidents of harassment and that officials harassed opponents who criticized the referendum (see Section 1.d.). The government-controlled printing press periodically refused opposition newspapers printing services, and journalists and media outlets faced libel suits from government officials (see Section 2.a.).

During the year, there were 43 registered political parties. The new Constitution prohibits election of candidates to the Parliament on the basis of party list voting. Some parties have criticized this provision as potentially weakening political parties.

The Constitution provides for parliamentary elections every 5 years. The amended Constitution approved in February will create a unicameral legislature with 75 deputies following the 2005 elections, which critics contend may weaken the Parliament. Deputies will be directly elected from geographic districts. Unlike the 2000 parliamentary elections, there will no longer be any seats distributed proportionally based on party lists. On December 25, Parliament adopted a new election code that the OSCE determined did "not establish a legal framework that provides for democratic elections."

There were 7 women in the 105-seat legislature. Women held several high-level government posts, including the Chief Justices of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court, the Minister of Education and Culture, the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Governor of Issykul Oblast. The Democratic Party of Women participated in the parliamentary elections in 2000 and won two party seats, earning 13 percent of the party-list votes.

There were 19 seats in the legislature held by members of minority groups. Russians and Uzbeks were underrepresented in government positions, although members of minority groups held several top posts, including the Prime Minister, Minister of Agriculture, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Russian-speaking citizens (those who do not speak Kyrgyz) alleged that a ceiling existed in government employment that precludes their promotion beyond a certain level and that, in elections in previous years, some otherwise qualified candidates were disqualified on the basis of exams, the fairness of which was questioned (see Section 5).

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Human rights groups generally operated in a hostile environment and were faced with continuous government pressure to curtail their activities. Despite this pressure, most domestic independent human rights organizations, including the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, were able to continue investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases.

After the Government registered the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, the Coalition reported that law enforcement officials intimidated and harassed its members, including through threatening telephone calls and visits to members' homes (see Section 2.b.). On September 30, an MOJ official reported obtaining letters of resignation of five Coalition members.

Members of KCHR reported that police were monitoring their offices and frequently visited them asking questions about the whereabouts of KCHR president Ramazan Dyrlydayev.

Authorities harassed NGO members who criticized the constitutional referendum. NGOs reported that authorities compelled several dozen NGO leaders to sign letters recanting their past criticism of the referendum. On February 1, before the referendum, police detained KCHR activist Ryskeldi Mombekov and prevented him from observing the voting process. In April and May, government officials threatened Galina Kaisarova, a lawyer with the Helsinki Group, with the loss of her law license. In May, an unknown assailant attacked Dmitry Kabak, a human rights activist who monitored Kaisarova's trial.

In May, KCHR president Dyrlydayev left the country again, saying he feared imminent arrest. By year's end, the Prosecutor General had reopened its investigation, but no charges were filed. On May 11, Dyrlydayev was reelected as head of KCHR. On August 13, the MOJ required reregistration and accepted the registration application of a splinter group with different leadership and membership than the original. Dyrlydayev, members of KCHR, and international NGOs protested that the Government used these tactics to strip the leadership and registration of the group's original membership. The Government used similar tactics against the group in 1999 and later reinstated the original leadership and registration of KCHR.

Authorities threatened criminal prosecution of and violence toward high-profile activists involved in human rights and civil society related NGOs and their family members. On March 5, during his father's lawsuit against the Prime Minister, the 10-year-old son of human rights activist Tursunbek Akunov was beaten up on the street (see Section 1.f.).

There was no action taken on the 2001 assault on the executive director of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil

Society.

A number of international groups reported on human rights problems in the country, although none had offices in the country.

A pro-government NGO called the Association of NGOs worked closely with UNICEF on children's programs during the year. According to the Head of Penitentiaries, it also helped implement projects aimed at rehabilitating prisoners.

The Ombudsman's Office, created in 2002, actively worked to advocate for individual rights. The Office's mandate is to act as an independent advocate for human rights on behalf of private citizens and NGOs. The Ombudsman has the authority to recommend cases for review to courts, including the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court. On one occasion, the Ombudsman successfully appealed a wrongful dismissal case to a military court that the court had previously refused to hear. After review, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. The Ombudsman also appealed directly to the Supreme Court on behalf of the newspaper Moya Stolitsa, but was waiting for a reply from the court at year's end. During the year, the Ombudsman met with 857 persons to discuss complaints and received over 14,000 appeals on various matters. A large part of the Ombudsman's work was focused on prison reform; he appealed to the President to establish separate prison facilities for female minors and to improve TB testing and treatment for prisoners.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution provides for the rights and freedom of individuals and prohibits discrimination, including that based on language. The Government expressed a strong commitment to protecting the rights of members of all ethnic and linguistic groups, as well as those of women; however, in practice it did not always ensure these rights effectively.

Women

The law specifically prohibits domestic violence and spousal abuse; however, violence against women, including domestic violence, remained a problem. Interior Ministry statistics indicated that during the year there were over 300 sexual crimes against women, but actual figures were probably significantly higher. Many crimes against women were not reported due to psychological pressures, cultural traditions, and apathy by law enforcement officials.

Activists noted that rape was becoming more common, although it was not clear whether the incidence of rape or only the reporting of such attacks was becoming more common. There were 247 rapes reported during the year. Authorities often ignored such attacks. There were reports that police raped women in custody. The Government did not take specific action to deal with this problem of violence against women.

Several local NGOs provided services for victims of domestic violence. Organizations involved with battered women also lobbied for new laws on domestic violence. The Association of Crisis Resolution Centers for Women and Children (ACRC) operated with continued support from the Soros Foundation. ACRC has member organizations in Bishkek, Osh, Jalal-Abad, Naryn, Batken, Cholpon-Ata, and Talas. Another center in Bishkek, Sezim, maintained a staff of lawyers, psychologists, and doctors and operated a crisis hotline for the public. Staff members conducted training, debates, and seminars on women's rights and family planning. Sezim opened a women's shelter in Bishkek in October. There also were internationally funded crisis centers in both Talas and Jalal-Abad. A crisis center in Naryn operated by the NGO Tendesh maintained a hotline to support women affected by violence and provided psychological, legal, and medical assistance.

Trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution was a persistent problem (see Section 6.f.).

Some rural inhabitants continued the traditional practice of kidnapping women and girls for forced marriage; the MVD reported that each year between 10 and 30 women were kidnapped and forced into marriage.

Sexual harassment is prohibited by law and is covered in the Criminal Code. Penalties range from fines to imprisonment.

Discrimination against women persisted. Family law prohibits divorce during pregnancy and while a child is younger than 1 year of age. The law gives equal status to women, and they were represented well in the work

force, in professions, and in institutions of higher learning.

Women were prominent in law, medicine, accounting, and banking and played an active role in the rapidly growing nongovernmental sector. However, deteriorating economic conditions had a severe effect on women, who were more likely than men to lose their jobs. According to government statistics, the unemployment rate was 3.6 percent for women, compared with 2.6 percent for men. The average wages for women were substantially less than for men. Women with children under the age of 16 accounted for approximately two-thirds of unemployed women. Women made up the majority of pensioners, who have felt the negative effects of the country's economic downturn, which led to inflation and the erosion of pensions that often were paid late. Women's groups expressed particular concern about the situation of rural women. With the end of communism, traditional attitudes toward women reasserted themselves strongly in the countryside, where women were relegated to the roles of wife and mother, and educational opportunities were curtailed. Data indicated that women were becoming less healthy, more abused, less able to work outside the home, and less able to dispose of their earnings independently.

The Congress of Women operated legal clinics for women throughout the country to help counsel women on legal issues and women's problems. The Mercy Center ran a program to find employment in handicraft production for mothers of large families. The Center for Women's Initiative, Aigerim, had programs to assist needy families. Over 200 NGOs dealing with women's problems operated in the country during the year. Women's organizations focused on violence against women, gender equality, women's reproductive health, women's involvement in politics, and education in women's rights. One NGO, Diamond Association, focused on promoting the participation of women in traditional courts of elders.

Children

There were government programs, many of them financed from abroad, directed at improving the condition of children; however, the Government lacked resources to address fully basic needs for shelter, food, and clothing.

The country had a 97 percent literacy rate. The Constitution states that education is compulsory and free of charge for the first 9 years. The Law on Education and the Law on Protection of Children's Rights require that secondary education be free and universal.

Financial constraints prevented the Government from implementing free basic education for all students. Those families that kept their children in public schools had to pay burdensome administrative fees. Girls and boys attended school in equal ratios. According to UNICEF in 2002, the primary school enrollment ratio was 98 percent for both girls and boys. The secondary school enrollment ratio was 75 percent for boys and 83 percent for girls. The Criminal Code penalties for infringing on a student's right to obtain free secondary education range from receiving a public reprimand to 1 year of forced labor; the law penalizes parents who do not send their children to school or who obstruct their attendance. Many of those families who could afford it chose to send their children to more expensive private schools.

The Government has established two funds, Jetkinchek and Kadry XXI Veka (Cadres of the 21st Century), to provide educational benefits for low-income children and children with disabilities. Jetkinchek, a 1999 presidential educational program provided assistance such as pens, books, and clothes to low-income children. The program was primarily government-funded but received assistance from international organizations. Kadry XXI Veka was financed by international organizations and helped some youth continue their education abroad.

According to the Government, deaths from tuberculosis accounted for almost half of all deaths among infants under 2 years of age, and the incidence of tuberculosis and vaccine-preventable diseases such as diphtheria, polio, and measles continued to grow. A range of serious nutrition-related problems affected a large number of children, particularly in rural areas. According to UNICEF, approximately 11 percent of infants were moderately or severely underweight. The infant mortality rate was 20.1 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the under-5 mortality rate was 28.7 deaths per 1,000 live births. The Government provided health care for children. According to UNICEF, the Government financed 18 percent of routine vaccinations. The system of residence registration restricted access to social services, including healthcare and education, for children that belonged to certain groups, such as refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, and noncitizens (see Section 2.d.).

Child abuse continued to be a problem. Traditional social safety measures were inadequate to cope with the social pressures that affect families. During the last 3 years, 36 persons were convicted for involving a child in prostitution, sexual actions, and for the production of pornography, and 10 persons were convicted for sale and trafficking of children.

There were increasing reports of abandonment due to parents' lack of resources to care for children, which led to larger numbers of children in institutions, foster care, or on the street. According to UNICEF, the children most at risk were those in these 3 categories, with 10- to 14-year-olds the highest-risk age group. State orphanages and foster homes faced a lack of resources and often were unable to provide proper care. The Kyrgyz Children's Fund (KCF) was particularly concerned about the growing number of street children, many of whom left home because of abusive or alcoholic parents or desperate economic conditions. The Government reported that the number of street children nationwide varied between 2,000 and 15,000 depending on the season of the year. UNICEF estimated there were 2,000 street children in Bishkek. The majority of street children found temporary shelter at bazaars and bus or train stations. Approximately 80 percent of street children were internal migrants (see Section 6.f.).

There were over 300 child inspectors (MVD policemen) in the country charged with enforcing the law with respect to juveniles, but the MVD reported that this was not sufficient for the workload (see Section 6.f.). Several government programs, such as "New Generation," "Youth," and the Special Program for Prevention of Homelessness and Juvenile Delinquency, addressed children's issues during the year. These programs focused on preventive work by the MVD Inspectorate, NGOs, schools, and the public, including identifying families where children are neglected or have criminal records, visiting and counseling families, and sweeping the streets for homeless children. Detained street children were either sent home (if an address was known) or to a rehabilitation center. The MVD maintained two centers, one each in Bishkek and Osh. Children were kept at a rehabilitation center for no more than 30 days, after which they were either sent back to their families, or, if needed, to orphanages. The two rehabilitation centers were in poor condition and lacked sufficient food, clothes, and medicines. The police took 1,203 street children either to their families or to rehabilitation centers during the year.

The KCF had one shelter in Bishkek to provide food, clothing, and schooling to approximately 30 children. The Svetlii Put shelter received training assistance from UNICEF and cared for 244 children during the year. The SOS Children's Village, funded by the Austrian organization Kinder Dorf International and other foreign and domestic organizations, cared for orphans. Approximately 120 children lived in this village, which offered housing and a kindergarten. KCF also maintained a Children's Village in Issyk-Kul Oblast with capacity for 120 children. In August, the Meerim Fund established the Altyn Balalyk (Golden Childhood) Village. At year's end, only part of the Village was operating, providing medical services for the nearby city of Cholpanata. The Village does not intend to accept orphans until 2004.

The forced marriage of underage girls is illegal; however, it has become more common, and authorities often tacitly approved this practice. Cultural traditions and social structures discouraged victims from going to the authorities.

Trafficking of children for prostitution and labor remained a problem (see Section 6.f.).

Child labor was a problem (see Section 6.d.).

Human rights groups and the KCF monitored the condition of children and advocated for child rights. The Government's Commission on the Affairs of Under-Age Children, under the Office of the Prime Minister, worked as a focal point for the Government's activities to protect the rights of children and provided a forum for discussing and coordinating responses to children's problems.

The Government and its Commission continued to disseminate information regarding children's rights among both children and adults. The Ministries of Justice, Education, Culture, and Health, as well as the state television and radio company and various NGOs, also helped disseminate such information, including by translating information into Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek to reach different segments of the population. The Children's Media Centre (CMC), a Bishkek-based NGO, produced magazine and video stories about children's rights and the situation of children in the country. Student journalists participating in the CMC were required to receive training on the main principles of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The state-run television channel, KTR, donated airtime twice a month to the CMC's programs.

Persons with Disabilities

The laws provide for convenient access to public transportation and parking for persons with disabilities, subsidies to mass media sources that make their services available to the hearing or visually impaired, and free plots of land for the construction of a home. The National Human Rights Program 2002-10, adopted by presidential decree in January, contains provisions for protection of the rights of children with disabilities.

In practice, few special provisions were in place to allow persons with disabilities access to transportation, public buildings, and mass media. In addition, persons with disabilities often had difficulty finding employment because of

negative societal attitudes and high unemployment among the general population. The lack of resources made it difficult for persons with disabilities to receive adequate education. Social facilities for persons with mental disabilities were strained severely, because budgets have fallen and workloads remained heavy.

The Government provided support to a network of enterprises operated by the Society for Blind and Deaf and education programs for persons with disabilities. Numerous NGOs worked to improve conditions and provide services for children with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There were reports of discrimination in the treatment of citizens who were not ethnic Kyrgyz. Minorities alleged discrimination in hiring, promotion, and housing and that officials at all levels favored ethnic Kyrgyz. The latest statistical data released in August reflected the following ethnic breakdown of the population: 66.9 percent Kyrgyz; 10.7 percent Russian; 14.1 percent Uzbek; 1.1 percent Dungan (ethnic Chinese Muslims); and 1 percent Uighur. Other ethnic groups, including Tatars and Germans, comprised 6.2 percent of the population. Since independence more than 294,908 ethnic Russians and nearly 91,390 ethnic Germans have emigrated (see Section 2.d.).

Low-level authorities harassed and discriminated against Uighurs (see Section 2.d.). During the year, authorities beat Nadezhda Raimova for advocating on behalf of the Uighur community. Some Uighurs reported that police harassed and discriminated against them. In August, at an international conference on fighting crime and terrorism, Vice Prime Minister Kurmanbek Osmonov pointed to a growing threat from Uighur separatists who he alleged worked closely with international terrorists and their sponsors. The local Uighur cultural center protested the Vice Prime Minister's comments and accused him of attempting to "sow discord between general Kyrgyz society and ethnic Uighurs." Some Uighurs reported discrimination in employment and negative societal attitudes and media coverage of their community, although there was a large number of Uighur-owned small businesses and restaurants in Osh and Bishkek that operated without harassment during the year.

According to participants at a May conference sponsored by the Soros Foundation, the primary concerns of ethnic minorities in the country included limited representation in the executive branch of government, nationalistic attitudes, and biased media coverage. On July 20, Jalal-Abad businessman Kadyrjan Batyrov initiated an Assembly of Uzbeks to express demands for political representation at national and local levels and request greater cultural rights, such as Uzbek programs on state television and more Uzbek schools.

The Constitution designates Kyrgyz as the state language and Russian as an official language. It also provides for preservation and equal and free development of other languages spoken in the country. Kyrgyz increasingly replaced Russian, and the Government announced that by 2010 all government documents are to be in Kyrgyz. Russian-speaking citizens who do not speak Kyrgyz alleged that a ceiling existed in government employment that precluded their promotion beyond a certain level (see Section 3). In elections in previous years, some otherwise qualified candidates were disqualified on the basis of exams, the fairness of which was questioned. The Government did not take any action on a 2002 request by ethnic Uzbeks requesting that Uzbek be granted the status of a state language. University education continued to be carried out largely in Russian (although Kyrgyz instruction was available in some departments in some universities where textbooks were available), so that Russian-language capability remained an important skill for those who wished to pursue higher learning.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Labor Law provides for the right of all workers to form and belong to trade unions, and there were no reports that the Government tried to obstruct the formation of independent unions. The Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), the successor to the former official union, remained the only trade union umbrella organization in the country, although unions were not required to belong to it. The Federation had 1.2 million members. According to the Federation, approximately 94 percent of workers in the country belonged to unions.

The Federation was critical of government policies, particularly privatization, and their effect on working class living standards. According to the Federation, the Government has taken no action in response to this criticism. Growing numbers of smaller unions were not affiliated with the umbrella organization. One of the largest of these was the Union of Entrepreneurs and Small Business Workers, with a membership of approximately 15,000.

The law protects union members from anti-union discrimination, and there were no reports of discrimination against persons because of union activities.

The law permits unions to form and join federations and to affiliate with international trade union bodies; however, no meaningful affiliation with international trade union bodies took place.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law recognizes the right of unions to negotiate for better wages and conditions; however, there were no cases of workers exercising this right during the year. Although overall union structure and practice has changed only slowly from those of the Soviet era, there was growing evidence of active union participation in state-owned and privatized enterprises. The Government set the minimum wage, after which each employer set its own wage level.

While the right to strike was not codified, strikes were not prohibited. There were no retaliatory actions against strikers, nor were there instances of abuse directed specifically at unions or individual workers. Between September 29 and October 2, the Trade Union of Merchants held a strike to protest the Government's decision to require all bazaar vendors to use cash registers. As a result of the strike, the Government held negotiations with the Trade Union and postponed the introduction of cash registers until December.

There are Free Economic Zones (FEZs) that are used as export processing zones. The minimum wage law does not apply to the approximately 3,000 workers in ordinary FEZs.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Sections 6.d. and 6.f.).

The press continued to report that citizens were forced to work without pay on tobacco farms in Kazakhstan. In August, an official delegation from the Kyrgyz Migration Service visited Kazakhstan and inspected the situation of Kyrgyz workers on tobacco farms. They found Kyrgyz workers who received very low salaries and were provided with inadequate housing, but did not find any evidence of persons working entirely without pay.

There were reports that patients in psychiatric hospitals were routinely used for unauthorized labor in hospital grounds and domestic service for doctors and local farmers. The patients allegedly did not have a choice to refuse and were only paid with food, not money. The NGO Mental Health and Safety was working with the Ministry of Health to develop programs aimed at improving conditions in psychiatric hospitals; however, no reforms had been enacted by year's end.

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, some tobacco fields were located on school grounds, and schools required children to participate in the harvest (see Section 6.d.). The income earned went directly to the schools, not to the children.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Labor Code provides for the protection of children from economic exploitation and from work that poses a danger to their health, or spiritual, physical, mental, or academic development. The minimum age for employment varied with the type of work, but was no lower than 14. According to the Labor Code, the minimum age for basic employment was 18. This was consistent with the age for completing educational requirements.

The Labor Code is contradictory in the requirements it sets for the minimum age of employment of children in work that could harm their physical and moral well being (such as employment in casinos, bars, and night clubs). Article 285 states that such work is prohibited for those under age 21; however, Article 319 prohibits such employment for those under age 18. The Government submitted legislation to resolve this contradiction by lowering the age to 18, but Parliament had not yet adopted the new legislation. The Labor Code permits children under the age of 16 to perform strenuous work with parental consent; however, minors younger than age 18 could not work in underground conditions. For children between ages 14 and 16, Article 319 sets the maximum daily hours of work at 5 to 7 hours, respectively; children under 16 could not work during night shifts. These laws also applied to children with disabilities who work. A 2002 decree banned the employment of persons under 18 in a wide variety of categories of employment involving difficult or dangerous conditions, including such sectors as the metal or oil and gas industries, mining and prospecting, food industry, entertainment, and machine building. The National Human Rights Program for 2002-10 also contains provisions aimed at eradicating exploitative child labor.

Child labor was a problem and was becoming more widespread both in towns and rural areas (see Section 6.f.).

According to participants in a 2002 conference on child labor, child laborers were prevalent in the following sectors: Construction, prostitution, narcotics, tobacco, cotton, rice, cattle breeding, heavy industry, gasoline sales, car washing, shoe cleaning, retail sales of tobacco and alcohol, and work involving pesticides and chemicals. Since many children worked for their families or were "self-employed" in such occupations as selling newspapers, pushing handcarts at markets, and selling cigarettes and candy on the streets, it was difficult for the Government to determine whether their work schedules and environment conformed to government regulations. Families traditionally were large, and they considered it necessary at times for children to work at an early age to help support the family on its farm or in its business.

According to reports from various NGOs, child labor was particularly evident in the South. During the fall, classes were cancelled, and children were sent to fields to pick cotton. During the summer, children worked during the tobacco harvest and were involved in all steps of production from the actual picking of the leaves to the preparation for shipping. Schools required children to participate in the tobacco harvest--some fields were located on school grounds--and the income earned went directly to the schools, not to the children. Children also were involved in family enterprises such as shepherding, bread baking, selling products at roadside kiosks, and growing fruits and vegetables.

The procurator's office and the State Labor Inspectorate were responsible for enforcing employers' compliance with the Labor Code laws. During the year, the State Labor Inspectorate received \$45,000 (1,946,000 soms) in state budget funding and had 54 inspectors throughout the country. The Legislative Assembly's Committees of Health Protection, Women and Family, and Education, Science, and Cultural Affairs oversaw the legal protection of the interests of minors whenever new laws were discussed in Parliament. Compliance with the labor code was enforced by trade unions; however, given its budget constraints and lack of resources, the Government was unable to enforce the child labor laws adequately. Although those employers caught violating the Labor Code may be charged with disciplinary, financial, administrative, or criminal penalties, the punishment was usually minimal. In recent years, the State Labor Inspectorate usually conducted 15 to 20 child labor inspections annually. The Federation of Trade Unions also had the right to carry out child labor inspections when it received a complaint; there were no inspections during the year.

On December 30, the Government ratified International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Government supported several social programs to prevent the engagement of children in exploitative child labor. Araket, a national poverty reduction program, provided financial support for low-income families. New Generation, a children's rights program, worked to define suitable working conditions for children and to introduce new methods of monitoring employers' compliance with labor legislation. New Generation's Mandate is scheduled to expire in 2010.

The Government undertook additional initiatives to help protect minors from forced labor; however, since the budget was facing severe funding constraints, many children who were entitled to receive help did not receive it.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Government mandated the national minimum wage. During the year, the legal minimum wage remained approximately \$2.30 (100 som) per month. In practice, this wage was insufficient to ensure a decent standard of living for a worker and family. However, industries and employers generally paid somewhat higher actual minimum-level wages. Salaries in the health care field were among the lowest, averaging \$17 (714 som) per month. The Federation of Trade Unions was responsible for enforcing all labor laws, including the Law on Minimum Wages; minimum wage regulations largely were observed. Although, the enforcement of labor laws was nonexistent in the growing underground economy, market forces helped wages in the unofficial sector keep pace with official wage scales.

The standard workweek was 41 hours, usually within a 5-day week. For state-owned industries, there was a mandated 24-hour rest period in the workweek.

Safety and health conditions in factories were poor. A deterioration in enforcement of existing regulations continued to hamper investment to improve health and safety standards. The State Inspectorate of Labor was responsible for protecting and educating workers as well as informing business owners of their respective rights and responsibilities. The law establishes occupational health and safety standards, as well as enforcement procedures. Besides government inspection teams, trade unions were assigned active roles in assuring compliance with these laws, but compliance was uneven among businesses. The State Labor Inspectorate carried out inspections for all types of labor issues. Workers had the legal right to remove themselves from unsafe working conditions; however,

in practice refusal to work in situations with relatively high accident rates or associated chronic health problems could result in loss of employment, although only if informal methods of resolution failed.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, trafficking was a persistent problem. Trafficking victims alleged that government officials facilitated, or were complicit in, trafficking.

On August 9, the Government passed an amendment to the Criminal Code to criminalize trafficking. Under the new law, trafficking in persons is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Trafficking in persons, as defined by the new amendments, includes organizing illegal migration. Within 2 weeks of its adoption, the Government launched two separate investigations into trafficking operations, which were ongoing at year's end. In October, one person was convicted and sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Other laws were used to prosecute traffickers for kidnapping, trading in children, recruiting persons for exploitation, coercion into prostitution, rape, and deprivation of freedom. The maximum sentence for those prosecuted under these laws was 15 years. During the first 8 months of the year, the General Procuracy investigated 19 cases of trafficking-related crimes under these laws and was prosecuting 12 alleged offenders.

In 2002, according to the General Procurator's office, there were 11 cases of trafficking in persons (under Articles 124 and 159 of the Criminal Code) and 4 cases of recruiting persons into prostitution and organizing brothels (under Articles 260-261 of the Criminal Code). The Government prosecuted 16 offenders, investigated specific cases of trafficking, and provided specialized training for trafficking investigations. The Government did not extradite citizens charged with trafficking in other countries.

In April 2002, a presidential decree authorized implementation of a national Anti-Trafficking Plan of Action, which created a national council responsible for coordinating government efforts to implement the program. However, the Government lacked adequate resources to implement many aspects of the program. The agencies involved in the National Anti-Trafficking Plan were the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Health; the National Security Service; the State Procurator's Department; the State Agency of Migration; and the State Committee for Tourism, Sport, and Youth Policy. The council recommended that the Government cooperate with other governmental ministries and departments, as well as with international organizations, NGOs, and Interpol. According to the local NGO Sezim, the General Procurator's Office cooperated in the past with Sezim and indicated a desire to increase cooperation. However, observers have stated that the Government's commitment to actively combat trafficking was intermittent. Some Ministries were more actively involved in the problem than others, and inadequate training of law enforcement officers in identifying and fighting trafficking in persons hindered their ability to effectively combat the problem.

Although there were no reliable estimates for the number of persons trafficked annually, the IOM reported that approximately 4,000 women and 7 boys were trafficked abroad in 1999. During the year, IOM also reported that it dealt with several cases of trafficking, and assisted with the return of approximately 250 trafficking victims to the country from abroad. The NGO Podruga reported that it received 1,289 calls to their hotline during the first 6 months of the year. The country was primarily a source and transit point for trafficked persons, although there were a few reports of the country being a destination for women trafficked as prostitutes. According to the IOM, the country has become a transit point for individuals trafficked mostly from South Asia, China, and Afghanistan to the West. The exact number of those in transit was unknown. The country was a source for trafficked women and girls, largely to the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and South Korea for the purpose of prostitution.

The IOM reported some instances of trafficking of children for prostitution and labor (see Section 6.d.). A flourishing sex trade draws girls as young as age 10 from destitute mountain villages. According to the IOM, the sex trade involved trafficking abroad. The extent of this problem was unknown.

According to the Osh Migration Service, hundreds of destitute southerners have been trafficked to Kazakhstan as forced laborers on tobacco plantations, although figures were unavailable. An agreement drafted by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Kyrgyz Labor Migration, aimed at protecting the rights of Kyrgyz laborers in Kazakhstan, was passed in 2002.

Groups targeted by traffickers included young under- or unemployed women who were unable to earn a living, particularly ethnic Slavic women under the age of 25. Poor economic conditions, high unemployment, particularly in the South, and gender inequality made young women and poor workers vulnerable to traffickers who exploited them by offering lucrative jobs or marriage offers to rich men abroad. Often women were lured abroad, via

newspaper advertisements or announcements over the loudspeakers in the local bazaars. Women responding to job offers for waitresses, au pairs, or dancers could find themselves abroad without documents or money for return tickets and forced to work for their traffickers.

The IOM reported that traffickers were often persons who previously operated local prostitution networks. Trafficking victims reported that often their recruiter was a relative or close family friend. The victims also reported that trafficked individuals often became recruiters in the hopes of making more money. Recruiters used networks of returnees, family members, and friends to recruit victims. The IOM also indicated that tour agents, restaurants, and nightclubs supplemented their activities by providing young women to foreign prostitution rings. The Government began actively investigating firms that send individuals to work abroad to ensure they are in compliance with licensing laws. According to Osh-based NGO Golden Goal, three out of the five companies the NGO has identified as illegally sending individuals abroad have been closed down. There were no trafficking firms discovered during the year.

Observers believed that some government authorities might have facilitated or otherwise been complicit in trafficking activities.

Trafficking victims reported that, upon arrival in their destination country, their identification documents were taken away. Some reported that they were punished with gang rape if they tried to resist or escape and were denied medical treatment.

There were no reports that the Government deported foreign victims of trafficking during the year. According to an NGO, TAIS-Plus, three Uzbek women who had been sex workers were deported to Uzbekistan in 2001. The IOM reported that women working in the UAE were deported to Azerbaijan. Many of those who transited the country were abandoned by the traffickers and lived in hiding out of fear of being discovered by authorities. The OSCE and IOM reported that many of those who returned from commercial work overseas stated that they were forced to pay bribes to law enforcement officials to avoid imprisonment. According to NGOs, the Government did not assist trafficking victims, including those repatriated, with any special services or care facilities; nor did it provide funding to foreign or domestic NGOs for services to victims.

International NGOs that were involved in trafficking issues included the IOM, the OSCE, and UNICEF. The IOM conducted a series of workshops for law enforcement officers. A number of NGOs--including Women's Support Center, TAIS-Plus, New Chance Sezim and Podruga--provided legal, medical, and psychological counseling and assistance, and economic aid to trafficking victims. In November, Sezim opened a shelter in Bishkek for trafficking victims. IOM was searching for a local implementing partner to open a shelter in the South. Several media articles, public service announcements, and a traveling theater show publicized the dangers of working abroad, and posters on public transport raised public awareness of the problem.

The IOM, OSCE, and local organizations sponsored various preventive programs. In January, the OSCE and IOM produced anti-trafficking public service announcements. The IOM held numerous roundtables and workshops to increase awareness among the government, nonprofit, tourism, and media sectors. The Women's Support Center distributed brochures in Kyrgyz and Russian targeting women who might be approached about going abroad. Sezim had a reporter on staff who worked to place articles in Kyrgyz-language print media.